

THE
NEW ORLEANS
MEDICAL AND SURGICAL
JOURNAL.

MAY, 1876.

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

~~THE OPIUM HABIT, AND "OPIUM-MANIA CURES."~~

BY STANFORD E. CHAILLE, A.M., M.D.,

Professor of Physiology and Pathological Anatomy, Medical Department, University of Louisiana.

An acquaintance, soliciting friendly and professional aid, avowed with humiliation that he was a slave to the opium-habit. He gave a familiar history of remorse for the past, shame and suffering for the present, and dread for a future of degradation. While the emotions were too active, the memory good, and judgment sound, the enfeebled will had become utterly powerless to master the remorseless appetite. Good resolutions, often repeated, had served only to increase the demoralization; for memory registered against each one a violation of conscience and of self-respect.

Striving to inspire my patient with increased horror of his dreadful habit, and at the same time with needful courage to abandon it, I yet warned him how inefficient were prescriptions, that the chief reliance must be placed upon his own firmness and endurance; that when these failed him, then judicious restraint to enforce abstinence must replace his own enfeebled will, and that I would sustain and control him to the extent of the power he would entrust in my hands. Unlimited power was freely given, abject submission promised, and the conflict began between sound reason on the one hand and a depraved appetite

on the other, with a poisoned body the battle field, and an enfeebled will vacillating from one to the other side.

In painfully tedious succession restless days followed sleepless nights, and both were rendered so exhausting by clammy sweats, by gnawing gastric pains, by sickening nausea, and by depressing broodings of the imagination, that the suffering body was tortured to the limit of endurance, and self-destruction was threatened as preferable to the agony imposed by abstinence. This, after long-continued abuse of opiates, is attended always, in my experience, by profuse sweating and diarrhoea; so that nature requires no aid from art to cleanse the circulation of its perilous poison. To replenish the blood with healthy constituents, milk punch and all nourishment the stomach would bear were, from the first, freely given. Such simple remedies as the varying symptoms seemed to indicate were administered; and of those intended to act on the nervous system, none mitigated the sufferings to so great an extent as digitalis. But the chief treatment was a tyrannical persistence in total abstinence from all opiates, to which were added sympathetic assurances that this was the shortest and only road to success, and that in from five to eight days the intense suffering and sleeplessness would diminish, while appetite, courage, and self-control would correspondingly increase.

A week weary to the physician, far more weary to the patient (from the third night to about the sixth day having been as usual the period of greatest suffering), ushered in a fair prospect of success, which subsequent weeks fully realized. After two months my patient wrote: "I have improved in weight fifteen pounds, my appetite and digestion are first rate, and I sleep sweeter than at any time during the past three years, that is, since my habit began. I have not taken nor had administered to me, in any form, any opiate or alcoholic stimulant of any kind since I saw you; and what is far more encouraging, I have no desire for the slow poison, and believe now, as I do in my God, that nothing on this earth shall ever wield such an influence over my moral nature as will cause me to succumb to its terrible and ravaging influence. For all this happiness, doctor, I thank you, and owe it solely to your firmness and medical treatment, which I can never forget as long as this new blood courses through my veins. The dawn of a new life is already opening before me, and every morning, as I awake, I feel the terrible

pang of having wasted three years of my best life.” A month later he wrote: “As far as the drng or any other stimulant is concerned, I never have the least desire for it; on the contrary, I loathe the very mention of opium.”

Though experience sadly teaches that the opium habit acquires greater power, and is more liable, when interrupted, to relapse, than even alcoholism, and that the only trustworthy remedy is *enforced* abstinence long continued, still, I can not refrain from deriving great hope from, and entertaining great confidence in, the above assurances of my patient. The good result is of course attributable chiefly to his own power of endurance, and high moral sense, which fortunately his opium habit had left sufficiently vigorous to render him acutely sensitive to the humiliation of his bodily and mental condition. That one possessed of so much intelligence, so readily and powerfully influenced to good, should have been for many months the credulous dupe of an advertising quack, is proof that it is a duty to society to expose the pretences of these remorseless charlatans, who poison the afflicted with one hand, while robbing them with the other.

When I undertook my patient’s case, he had been for a long time and was then taking “Dr. Beck’s Opiumania Cure.” The symptoms, with a smell at the mixture, were sufficient to prove that the ingenious Dr. Beck appeased the diseased appetite by feeding it; that he cured the opium-mania by persisting in the abuse of opium, and that, by thus confirming the malady, he perpetuated the demands of his victims for incessant supplies of the divine gift, which he vouchsafes to confer on his suffering fellow-creatures at the self-sacrificing rate of \$10 per four ounce vial!!

This marvellous vial, with its secret contents discovered by the fortunate genius and medical wisdom of Dr. Beck was at once captured; in order, chiefly, that the total abstinence from opium insisted on might be successfully enforced, and subordinately that the proofs, to me already satisfactory, of the composition of this “opiumania cure” might be conclusively tested by chemical analysis. This has been ably and carefully done by the accomplished chemist of the N. O. Charity Hospital, Mr. J. Johnson, and his instructive report is appended to this article.

Prior to the letters already quoted from my patient, he wrote: “I send you all the papers and documents relating to Dr. Beck

that I can find. He has sold me this medicine nearly a year, and the effects were about the same as opium, and I fell off in weight instead of increasing. Since you cured me I have increased ten pounds. [After abstinence this increase of weight is usual.—S. E. C.] Notwithstanding the testimonials speak well of Dr. Beck, I look upon him as the greatest humbug of the age; for, when you once get under the influence of his mixture, it becomes as difficult to break off and take other opiates as to quit the use of opium itself. I can look back and see it all now, but could not then, for I was chained, and knew not how to get unbound."

These papers and document now in my possession, furnish the following entertaining information by Dr. Beck as to himself and his testimonials. Nobly reckless of expense when inspired with the hope of doing so much good—and of selling so many \$10 4-oz. vials!—he supplies any supplicant with a neat twenty-page circular, adorned with the "counterfeit presentment" of his philanthropical lineaments. Like great prophets, his merits are too transcendent to justify any untimely modesty; and Dr. John Crofton Beck gushingly informs the admiring world of his age, place of birth, race, previous condition, etc. Proud Indiana claims him as her son, the fortunate Medical College of Ohio gladly adopted him in 1848, "after one course of lectures," as its professional child. Thus launched, greatness swiftly followed. In 1858, behold! him Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the Cincinnati College of Medicine and Surgery, and in 1862 transferred to the Professorship of Anatomy and Physiology. Patriotism then triumphing over love of honorable station, he became Surgeon of the 53d Kentucky Volunteers. He was Editor for several years, "with recognized ability," of the *Cincinnati Medical and Surgical News*, President of the School Board of Newport, Ky., and the family physician of Gen. Grant's father. Finally, since 1870 he has self-sacrificingly devoted himself, at No. 112 John street, Cincinnati, "especially to the cure of opiumania." It is encouraging to be assured, especially by Dr. Beck, that Dr. Beck's skill, success, honesty of purpose, application to duty, studious habits, zealous energy, and unlimited resources, "inspire the most despondent with a portion at least of his own unbounded courage and enthusiasm;" that "no pecuniary consideration could induce him to encourage a palpable delusion," and that *Brother Beck* (for he is a brother Methodist as well as a brother Mason)

is so gorged with piety that he could not “trifle in matters of important moment to the present and hereafter of a fellow-being”!

As open and disgusting as is this brazen-faced quackery, it is not so mortifying as are his assurances, fortified by quotations and specifications, that members of an honorable profession, who are now respected in its ranks, have furnished testimonials most flattering to him and to his “cure,” and most deceptive to the public. It is earnestly hoped that this shameless imposter is as bankrupt in truth as in modesty, and that these published testimonials may prove to be forgeries, whereby he calumniates the following members of the medical profession, viz.:

Dr. Lee Holt, of Colaparchee, Ga., ex-Division Surgeon of Stonewall Jackson’s Corps, C.S.A.

Dr. J. E. McMillan, of LaGrange Ga.

Dr. Luke W. Smith, of Canton, Miss.

Dr. J. C. Bierbower, of Austin, Texas.

Dr. J. C. Kerr, of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Drs. Whitesel, Cooper, Cochran, Rawlins, Canady, Norris, Lewis, Cronse, and Hackleman, of the Medical Association of Ogden, Indiana; and Drs. Dawson, Doherty, Parker, and Dunlap (supposed to be) of Louisa, Lawrence County, Ky.

It is doubtful if any disease is so utterly destructive of the happiness and welfare, not only of the afflicted individual, but also of family friends and society, as is the opium-mania. Recorded experience is unanimous in enforcing, that in no condition is the demoralization so complete and hopeless. The poisoned imagination revels in the construction of ingenious falsehoods, and becomes reckless of the endless mischief which exaggeration, untruthfulness, and scandal inflict. While strict veracity even in little things imposes an impossible task on a brain long fed with opiatized blood, oaths the most solemn are violated while the lips are yet moist with the sacred words, and conscience is too exhausted to retaliate with even one pang of remorse. Physical suffering and moral degradation alternate endlessly with mental stupor, and produce a condition worse than imbecility or insanity. Against these, society protects itself (though still inadequately) by its familiarity with these conditions, and by its laws; but the opium-mania is less generally known, the victim often undetected, his acts misconstrued, the misery he inflicts unappreciated, and our ineffi-

cient laws ignorantly fail to afford any protection whatever either to the afflicted person, or to others necessarily involved in his affliction. Thousands of households in this, tens of thousands in all civilized lands, have sad cause to bitterly mourn that laws do not permit, and fail to provide for the application of the *only reliable remedy*—total abstinence from the poison enforced by incarceration in appropriate asylums or hospitals. With full legal liberty to destroy and degrade himself, to inflict misery and shame on family and friends, and to injure society in common with these, the unhappy victim is constantly lured by our newspapers and journals to squander his means upon the “opium-cures” of advertising quacks. In this nefarious work *Harper's Weekly*—the “journal of civilization”!—is especially prominent, assigning places in every issue of its *civilizing* columns to these advertisements, which, though perhaps more decent, are not less injurious than the *N. Y. Herald's* advertisements of abortionists. A like trade is pursued in England. The *British Medical Journal*, September 4th, 1875, states that a “sure cure for the opium habit” was found to contain two grains per dose of sulphate of morphia to be taken three times a day!

Indignant at, anxious to correct such evils as are these advertisements, and as is the lack of legal protection for the hopeless and maniacal abusers of opium, alcohol, etc., the assurance will be given, probably by lawyers and so-called statesmen, that any effectual laws would endanger the “freedom of the press” and the “liberty of the subject”—an assurance which forcibly recalls the saddest cry of justice and of true freedom, “Oh! Liberty, how many crimes are done in thy name!”

For the benefit of those desiring further information as to this subject attention is called, to the well-known and classical “Confessions of an Opium-Eater,” by Thomas De Quincey (Ticknor & Co., Boston, 1850); to the instructive book, “The Opium Habit” (New York, Harper & Bros., 1868); and to the more useful and practical “Opium and the Opium Appetite,” by Alonzo Calkins, M.D. (Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1871). “Opium-Eating,” by an Habituate—from Claxton, Remsen & Co., Philadelphia, 1876—is one of those many books which cause an intelligent reader to stand aghast at the inanity of the author and the folly of the publisher. Should my reader desire to experience true grief for an ill-spent dollar, let him invest it in this crème de la crème of trash.

CHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF DR. BECK'S "OPIUMANIA CURE."

I.

Capacity of vial is four fluid ounces.

II.

Contents measured two fluid ounces.

III.

A glance at the deep-brown, dirty-looking mixture shows it to be one by no means homogeneous in character, and by taking one-half ounce and subjecting it to filtration through paper, it was easily separated into a clear brown liquid and a dark brown residue. The liquid obtained was devoted to a preliminary examination, with the object in view of gathering a general idea of the nature of the compound and the difficulties that would have to be overcome in making an analysis. No well-defined opium reactions could be gotten, they, of course, being masked by the deep brown coloring matter present. About the only definite information derived was that the liquid contained considerable alcohol, a small quantity of free acetic acid, and a good deal of substance in solution.

A quarter ounce of the original mixture was next evaporated on a water-bath to half its bulk, to free it from alcohol. The aqueous remainder, diluted with water, subjected to dialysis, with hope of obtaining a tolerable colorless solution of whatever crystalloids might be contained in it, gave a result entirely unsatisfactory, on account of the coloring matter passing through the membrane with great rapidity.

Another quarter ounce was evaporated, as in the previous experiment, and rendered slightly alkaline with liquor ammonia, then shaken with warm amylic alcohol. Again the coloring matter became an obstacle, as it proved readily soluble. The amylic residue, however, gave distinct morphia reactions.

Experimenting upon the liquids contained in the dialyzer, I found precipitation of the coloring matter by means of acetate of lead gave the best result. Resorting to this method the liquids of the dialyzer were mixed, and the resulting mixture treated with solution of acetate of lead as long as it produced any precipitate. The mixture having been warmed, allowed to cool, and filtered—the precipitate being reserved (A)—gave a

clear and nearly colorless solution, through which a current of sulphuretted hydrogen was passed until all lead left in the filtrate had been converted into sulphide. After filtration a colorless liquid was obtained that behaved with reagents as follows:

Solution of perchloride of iron gave a deep blue color;

Iodie acid, a brown color;

Solution of iodie acid mixed with starch, a blue color;

Tannic acid, a white precipitate;

Liquor potassa, a white precipitate almost entirely soluble in excess. Filtering off the insoluble portion (B), the alkaline solution treated with a current of carbonic oxide gave a white precipitate, which, after collection on a filter, proved to consist of needle shaped crystals, possessing a bitter taste, not very soluble in water, but easily so in dilute acids. Portions of this substance, placed upon a porcelain slab, gave with—

Nitric acid, a yellow-red color;

Sulphuric acid containing a minute quantity of nitric acid, a violet-red color;

Molybdic acid dissolved in sulphuric acid, struck a violet color which disappeared on adding a few drops of water, leaving a brown, turbid fluid.

That we have morphia present cannot be doubted.

The insoluble portion obtained in (B) proved—

Insoluble in cold and readily soluble in hot alcohol;

Very soluble in chloroform;

Soluble in dilute sulphuric acid, the solution giving, with liquor potassa and carbonate of potassa, white precipitates;

Chlorine water added to the dilute sulphuric acid solution, produced a yellowish-green coloration, which on the addition of ammonia changed to red;

Nitric acid gave a colorless solution that turned yellow when warmed.

That the substance we are dealing with is narcotine will hardly be denied.

The acetate of lead precipitate (A) was next suspended in a little water and treated with a stream of sulphuretted hydrogen. After complete decomposition and filtration, a clear, slightly colored liquid remained, that behaved as follows:

Solution of perchloride of iron gave a deep red color, which did not disappear on addition of sulphuric acid and metallic zinc

Nitrate of silver, chloride of barium and acetate of lead, all gave white precipitates.

Meconic acid thus indicated, we have now the three principal constituents of opium; we have furthermore learned the best way of proceeding in making a quantitative estimate. So, following out the path laid down in the preceding experiments, a half ounce of *the cure* was evaporated on a water-bath until quite dry, dissolved in one-half ounce of hot water, treated with solution of acetate of lead, filtered, a current of sulphuretted hydrogen passed through the filtrate, all as previously described, with the exception of both precipitates being carefully washed. The resulting solution was concentrated till it measured two drachms, treated with liquor potassa in quantity sufficient to dissolve all of the precipitate at first produced, that was soluble in excess, filtered—the filter being washed with cold water—treated with a current of carbolic oxide for about an hour, exposed a couple of hours to a low temperature, and then thrown upon a *counter-poised* filter.

The crystalline residue, washed with a little ice-water, and dried in *vacuo* over sulphuric acid for twenty-four hours, weighed 3.23 centigrammes, or about one-half grain. Now, taking the percentage of morphia in opium to be ten, which I believe to be a fair estimate in this case, this will give us five grains of opium to half an ounce, or one grain and a quarter to one drachm.

J. JOHNSON, *Chemist and Apothecary,*
Charity Hospital, New Orleans.

